

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Duncan Hunter, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN DUNCAN HUNTER

Mark-up of H. Res. 364 - Wexler Resolution of Inquiry

The committee meets this evening to mark-up House Resolution 364 which calls on the President to provide certain documents to the Congress dealing with the subject of the reconstruction of Iraq.

This resolution of inquiry was introduced by our colleague Robert Wexler on September 9, 2003 and, under House Rules, the committees of jurisdiction have 14 legislative days during which to act on the matter before they are discharged from further consideration. As the 14 days expire at the end of the week, we find it necessary to act this evening in order to grant members their full privilege to provide additional views before the report is filed. The International Relations Committee already took up this matter last Thursday and reported out the resolution adversely.

The resolution itself requires the President to provide the House with a “report prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) entitled ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom Strategic Lessons Learned’” as well as documents in the President’s possession “on the reconstruction and security of post-war Iraq.”

First, the “report” in question is actually a classified briefing prepared by junior officers on the JCS intended to become part of a larger effort to assess and analyze, at the strategic level, the conduct of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I understand that this briefing is a preliminary document that is incomplete and has not received the review necessary for it to reflect the view of the JCS.

The briefing document is intended to capture the results from interviews of hundreds of individuals that participated or had insight into the planning and execution of the Iraq campaign. Since this interview process was not complete when this classified document was unfortunately leaked to the media, its premature release can only serve to confuse rather than illuminate the issue.

Further, members of this committee are well familiar with the considerable time and effort devoted by the Department of Defense to analyze itself following the conduct of major military operations. This process has been specifically encouraged over the years by the committee as a valuable method of identifying, assessing and learning the most important lessons from a given operation in order to apply them in the next conflict.

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Recent examples of this are the considerable after-action reviews conducted following Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and the Operation Allied Force in Kosovo during 1999. In fact, the committee, during House action on this year's defense authorization bill as well as current conference deliberations, has endorsed a legislative provision mandating such a review for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Further, the committee is scheduled to receive testimony this Thursday from the Commander of Joint Forces Command on the conclusion of the theater-level after- action review they were charged to conduct.

The point here is that there is nothing sinister or unusual in the fact that the JCS -- as well as virtually every other organization in the DOD -- is presently engaged in a self-assessment of the performance of the war. What is unusual is that some in Congress would pick out one minor sub element of this massive undertaking and elevate it to the point of political contention rather than allowing this process to run its normal, healthy and well understood course.

Members have in front of them a copy of the letter I have received from General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff committing to provide the committee with the document in question, and more importantly, the more comprehensive report of which it is a sub element, once they are completed. As this document is classified, it will be available to any member of the House pursuant to appropriate handling procedures.

Final point. I think it is important to note that this Administration has gone to extraordinary lengths at my personal encouragement to make its most senior officials available to the Congress during the run-up, conduct and aftermath of the war. By my count, since last September 44 separate classified briefings or hearings have taken place either on the House floor or in this room, where members can engage directly with either the Secretary of Defense personally or his senior civilian and uniformed advisors.

It is, therefore, difficult to understand how any member can be critical of the information being provided, particularly if they haven't made the effort to avail themselves of these frequent opportunities to engage the Administration on the issues.

For these reasons, at the appropriate point, I will strongly recommend that the committee report out this resolution **adversely**. In so doing, we will continue to pursue all possible means of engaging the Administration on this important matter through normal well-established channels to ensure we carry out our oversight duties responsibly while providing members the information they need to make well-informed decisions.

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